

FAMILY TRANSITION AT MARRIAGE 137

Family and community alike support them in their attitude. A woman could say bitterly, for she was childless: 183
842

No matter how much money you have and how good-looking you are, if you don't have children, you're no good. But if you're ugly as the worst and have children you are all right.

The husband has every right to express his displeasure at his wife's barrenness. To have no children is a source of shame to him and a terrible disappointment in his desire to continue his line upon the farm. One woman put it: 183
593
842

The man wants children because he is afraid others will tell him he is no good if he hasn't any. Children are the curse of the country, especially if you haven't any.

In the country districts they say that he may beat her and in their graphic phrase "bounce a boot off her now and then for it." Country belief still regards the woman as the offending partner in a childless marriage. Near Inagh one farmer, a returned Yankee, was regarded as an anomaly because, though childless, he treated his wife just as well as though she had many and did not get angry when he was twitted on his lack of an heir. They explained it by saying that he "knew it was his own fault." [195] ●

The day of the "country divorce," as the farmers call it, is rapidly passing. In the old days, they say, a man might send a barren wife back to her parents, though Catholic law forbade him to marry again. There are cases which illustrate that the custom survives in altered form. They are particularly revealing in our analysis of the desire to preserve the family unity and its identification with farm and household through the generations. Here the brothers act, sociologically, as a single individual in order to insure the desired continuity. For instance, in one case, a middling farmer of Corrofin, childless after several years, got a country divorce. He gave the land thereafter to his brother in return for a thousand pounds, which the brother had inherited in lieu 586
842

593 more apparent, balance of emotional forces which it entails.

For this balance is the health of a complete social organism. The countryman who occupies boyhood status so long ordinarily does not revolt. His economic dependence galls him perhaps at times, but he cannot regard it as an injustice. That dependence is itself a product of healthy balance. He has expectancies and prospects; father and mother owe him obligations for which he can and does wait; emotional bonds are fiercely strong, for there is little opportunity to diffuse them. The solidarity of his own family is strengthened through competition with other socio-economic units. The endless petty disputes of the countryside over rights of way, boundaries, cattle trespasses, drainages, are much more than defences of property. "The two grandfathers" of the contestants "began it" is the usual defence in court. That solidarity is a mountain of strength against the outside world. "Defending

● [195] Tim Flanagan's title" is the jocular way of describing armed resistance to eviction in the country districts in Clare. For Tim Flanagan worked a farm with ten strong adult sons; evicting ten armed stalwarts is no small matter for the best of police. Sons and brothers are a better title than the clearest deed.

The controls in farm work, then, are those of a social group—the family. The countryman at work is little concerned with the usual economic cate-

" COUNTRYMEN AT WORK

67

statement, "country people do be very friendly, they always help one another".

476
602

Now, 'have right' and 'friend' are both expressions in the brogue. Like so much of that rich English dialect, for it is a true dialect with an ancient history, both words translate Gaelic idiom. A 'friend' is a relative. To 'have right' expresses an obligation, a duty and the traditional fitness of an act. It is an anglicization of an Irish *tá cóir orm*, 'the obligation is on me'. The countryman is explaining his acts as part of the traditional reciprocities of sentiment and duty which make up his system of kinship.

476
602
195 ●
[197]

This fact strikes one the more strongly when one finds him describing other traditional acts of obligation to kindred in exactly the same terms. Aid lent and duties performed at wedding and funeral are felt to be in the same category as co-operation in farming. Thus a farmer of my acquaintance could say of a cousin: "He is the best friend we ever had; we can make bold on him. Johnny sent down a cow and calf worth £12 to us and didn't want anything for it." And he could go on in more general terms: "Everybody's friends in the country here are very good to you; they lend you a horse with the hay, or a boy going to the fair, or they send down to help when somebody dies with you". It is part of the 'friendliness' owed one's kinsmen to make up and serve food at wakes and weddings, to dig the grave, to carry the coffin, to

476
602

HARVEST

243 grasses and flax. The many practical uses of straw will be
[301] described in a later chapter and its employment in fashioning
various kinds of dolls, ceremonial dresses and masks, for
example on St. Briget's Day. Certain protective charms were
789 also made of oat-straw, for example the Bratóg Brighde (St.
243 Briget's rag or mantle) worn by the fishermen of Tory Island
as a protection against storms. Here the explanation may lie in
the power of wind over bits of loose straw which by association
gives the straw the secret of controlling the wind. This is the
basis of the phrase used in Co. Cavan to describe something
• [195] which circulates quickly: 'going round like the straws'. It was
[821] the custom to ward off storms by running with a handful of
straws from one farm to another.

243 With corn, as with hay and turf, the harvesting proceeds by
building up stooks and ricks of increasing size according to the
nature of the crop and the weather conditions. Little stooks
(footings) of four or six sheaves are the first stage in the con-
struction of the twelve-sheaf stooks (ten standing and two
inverted hooding sheaves) which, however, are generally con-
fined to wheat (Fig. 51). It is the general practice to build the
little stooks of corn, after one or two weeks' seasoning, into
hand-stacks which are of a convenient size to make a load for
the rick-shifter, or for the tractor-lifter which is replacing it.
The shapes of these miniature stacks, varying from one district
to another, are often extremely picturesque, and their serried
rows marching up the hillsides give the autumn fields a popu-
lated appearance. Their many names (hut, shig, bart, adag, and
so on) would indicate that they are no novelty, and these little
field stacks are as characteristic of Wales and Scotland as they
are of Ireland (Fig. 52). A picturesque variety of hay-stack,
commonly seen in Connacht, is the sheep-cock, built around a
tall pole which prevents the cock from collapsing when eaten
away at the base.

FIXED FESTIVALS

Easter would take us away from our present subject but mention must be made of some of the folk practices connected with Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Easter and Whitsuntide. Shrove Tuesday (Shraft) was a time for hunting the hare, and for feasting in preparation for Lent. A portion of the meat was not eaten but hung in the rafters. It was the great day of the year for marriages, and on that night tricks of many kinds were played on unmarried adults and on courting couples who had not fulfilled their promise. They were serenaded with horn-blowing; animals were tied to the doors of their houses, and cart wheels were rolled down hill. At Ardmore in Co. Waterford a piece of symbolic horseplay was performed by the young men on Ash Wednesday. A hollowed stone with a hole in the centre was the scene of the play. In the hole was stuck a wattle with a handful of tow tied to its top, and unmarried women were made to dance around the stone, holding the tow and spinning while they danced. "The youths then terminated their amusements by dragging them through the village seated on old logs of wood."¹ 527 584

Good Friday was an important day in the farmer's year, the luckiest day on which to begin the sowing of corn. There was an aversion to the use of iron and to the shedding of blood on Good Friday, which was a favourite day for visiting holy wells and the graves of the dead. Shell-fish were eaten, and visits to the shore were enlivened with games and horse-racing. On Easter Day the young folk would be up early in the morning to see the sun dance, and during the day vast quantities of eggs were consumed. The colouring and rolling of eggs are customs kept up by children in many districts. A special Easter Day dance, for which the prize was a large cake exhibited on a garlanded churn-staff, is popularly supposed to have given rise to the expression 'taking the cake', in the sense of beating all comers. If Easter was a lucky time, ominous superstitions attached to Whitsuntide, for example persons born at that time were supposed to have the evil eye, to be fated to die a violent death, or to take a life. A chicken would sometimes be killed in the hands of a Whitsun child to serve as a substitute slaughter. To cross water or go to sea at Whitsun was to invite death by drowning. 527 [784] [788] [769] [857] [195] [787]

¹E. Fitzgerald, *J.R.S.A.I.* (1856), 43.

JOHN C. MESSENGER

12 cultivate that "sharpness of ear . . . feeling for half-tones and shades and subtleties, and . . . wary alertness" which characterize ethnographic endeavor as an art as well as an epistemology.

181 The use by the folk of "wings of fancy," "honeyed words," and
• 195 "obfuscations"—popularly known as "blarney"—reflects a long tradition
[178] of verbal skill. It is a vital component of Irish and Inis Beag "charm,"
which often is a product of a delicately poised set of defense mechanisms;
beneath it can lie feelings of inferiority and dislike, envy, and jealousy
of others. Blarney can very effectively serve to shield genuine thoughts
[538] and feelings and thus protect the ego. Irish folklore and literature also
reflect this tradition of verbal skill, and it is probably expressed most
formidably in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. (At least one
folklorist has collected "Joycean utterances" from Irish peasants.)

123 Most of our information came from observation and unguided
interviews. It proved impossible to take field notes openly, except when
collecting innocuous data—such as the number of livestock owned by
each householder—from a few particular persons. Thus, we were forced
to limit our visits to less than two hours, after which we immediately
transcribed what our combined memories could resuscitate. Despite frequent
[562] explanations of our presence in Inis Beag, which were candid and
truthful, it was thought by the islanders that I was interested only in
archeological sites and oral literature, and that my wife was not a trained
and experienced co-worker; this, obviously, reflects their previous ex-
periences with scientists and their conception of the position of women
in society. Their inability to evaluate adequately our intentions proved
[609] to be a research boon. For once "accepted" (a relative term, since no
outsider is ever accepted) after many months in the island, we were
allowed to listen to and participate in conversations and activities from
which we would otherwise have been excluded.

123 Our data on sex came from my involvement as a participant-
*831 observer in personal and often intimate conversations with men and my
wife's counseling of women who were bothered by such matters as ex-
plaining and coping with menstruation, menopause, mental illness, the
sexual curiosity of their children, and "excessive" sexual demands of
their spouses. Our sexual knowledge and sympathy coupled with their
needs and inquisitiveness gave rise to a "counselor-client" relationship
between many of the folk and ourselves. They came to speak freely, albeit
indirectly at times, with each of us about this sphere of behavior which
arouses so much anxiety and fear. I must mention that the relationship